



Aftermath of Disaster

What you can do for yourself and others

When you've experienced a trauma, it can be a shock to your whole system. Following are some ideas to help you cope with any physical or emotional symptoms you may have.

- Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol, including prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs, to numb the pain. It will only complicate or delay your recovery. Avoid caffeine, especially if you are having trouble sleeping.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals, even if you don't feel like it. Good nutrition is very important when you are feeling stressed. Get plenty of rest.
- Exercise regularly. It can help work off some physical stress symptoms, leaving you feeling calm and better able to relax. If you are feeling lethargic, exercise can help energize you and clear your mind.
- Structure your time and set priorities. Maintain your basic, normal routine but give yourself permission to skip the extras for a while.
- Don't make any major life changes or decisions. Do make as many small, daily decisions as possible to reassert your sense of control.
- Don't try to avoid or deny recurring thoughts or feelings about the incident. They are normal and will decrease over time.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and to share your feelings with others.
- Do things that you enjoy. Take mini-breaks, go out to dinner, enjoy ten minutes alone, or just watch a movie.
- Talk with people you trust (your family, friends, and co-workers) and don't be afraid to reach out.
- Don't be afraid to set limits with others when you don't feel like talking. You don't have to discuss the incident or your feelings when you don't want to.
- Don't label yourself as "crazy". Remind yourself that you are having normal reactions.
- Write down your thoughts and feelings. This can be especially helpful if you are having trouble sleeping or when you wake up from a troubling dream.
- Ask for help if you need it. If you are having trouble coping on your own, help is available from many sources.
- Professional assistance from a counselor may sometimes be necessary. This does not imply weakness or craziness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful to handle on your own.
- In the workplace, you may be able to get assistance from your co-workers, the human resource department, or the company Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Church, friends, family, and other community resources can be valuable sources of support.

What you can do for others

Take care of yourself first; then you can help others.

What you can do for others.

- Listen carefully.
- Acknowledge any feelings are normal now.
- Be sensitive to individual circumstances and different points of view.
- Don't take emotional responses, like anger, personally.
- Respect an individual's need for privacy. If someone doesn't want to talk about the incident or their feelings, don't insist.

Reach out at work.

- Organize support groups at work to help one another.
- Offer a “listening ear” to someone who hasn't asked for help, but may need it.
- Give encouragement, support, and understanding with on-the-job- issues.
- Identify resources for additional help. (The Employee Assistance Program, local AA and NA meeting schedules and locations, and others as needed.)
- Be alert to behavior changes with respect to the use of alcohol and other drugs as a means of coping with stress and grief.

Helping friends and family.

- Offer to spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer help with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, and caring for the family.
- Respect the person's need for privacy and time alone.
- Encourage contact with available help (EAP, community resources, support groups, and alcohol/substance abuse organizations).
- Be alert to behavior changes with respect to the use of alcohol and other drugs as a means of coping with stress and grief.